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C O N F I D E N T I A L BUDAPEST 001913

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DEPARTMENT PLEASE PASS TO NSC - DAMON WILSON

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SUBJECT: DEMONSTRATIONS CONTINUE; DISTINCTIONS EMERGE

REF: BUDAPEST 1902 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: POL/C ERIC V. GAUDIOSI; REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

¶1. (SBU) Crowds estimated at 10,000 - 15,000 gathered at Parliament on the evening of September 20, but the authorities report fewer and less severe violent incidents overnight. Residents are adjusting to the evening demonstrations against the Gyurcsany government and accept the peaceful expressions of opposition. Many, however, are drawing a clear distinction between the expression of free speech and the commission of criminal acts.

¶2. (U) Commenting on the "moral crisis" in a balanced statement issued September 21, the Permanent Council of the Hungarian Catholic Bishops' Conference called on those "responsible for our country" to act "according to truth and justice." The Bishops "definitely denounced illegal rioting whatever its motivation" and emphasized the importance of respecting "the rights of free speech and peaceful assembly."

¶3. (SBU) Several groups have postponed previously scheduled events to prevent their causes from being hijacked by criminal elements. The public transit advocacy group "Mass Appeal" cancelled a planned event on September 20, and local students groups have called off a demonstration against the government's tuition policy in order to distinguish their cause from the violence.

¶4. (C) In a brief statement issued September 21, FIDESZ announced the postponement of its September 23 rally "until after the local elections." The party continues to call for the Gyurcsany government to step down and negotiate a "government of experts" with the opposition. (Comment: Specifically cited by PM Gyurcsany in his September 20 meeting with Ambassadors (reftel), the FIDESZ rally had the potential to serve as a magnet for further violence. As Orban himself stated, "it is easier to get people out in the streets than to get them back home." Plans for the rally had reportedly proceeded at Orban's insistence despite the opposition of the majority of the party leadership. The event's cancellation may reflect the calculation that any violence at the event would be laid at FIDESZ's door, and the realization that the extreme fringe of the political right may be beyond FIDESZ's control. End Comment.)

¶5. (C) SZDSZ MP Matyas Eorsi told the DCM September 20 that his party "stands firmly 100% behind PM Gyurcsany" and the governing coalition. He described police unpreparedness on the first night as a reflection both of having "too many party insiders and not enough professionals in senior positions, and of a system with "too few decision-makers." He believes that FIDESZ's efforts to cast the upcoming local elections as a referendum on the government will mobilize MSZP and SZDSZ voters who might otherwise have stayed home, and predicts that FIDESZ will do well in the countryside - as expected - but still be "disappointed" by the results. Eorsi believes the public will be put off by what appears to have been premeditated violence, and thinks the people will remain "scared" of Orban.

¶6. (U) In a press conference September 21, Budapest Mayor

Gabor Demsky (SZDSZ) commented that the police had confined the "hooligans" to "smaller and smaller areas" and noted that life in Budapest is "returning to normal." He described the "Gyurcsany tape" as "oil on the fire ... which Orban lit," and warned the public that extremists can still win "an indirect victory" in the local elections if their intimidation tactics keep the public from the polls.

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